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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. State Department Release of 2003 Human Rights Report

12. Alhurra TV Station

Key stories in the media:

Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli diplomatic officials as saying that the White House and State Department are not showing the same types of divisions regarding the disengagement plan that emerged in 2002 over the road map. The newspaper quoted the officials as saying that the divisions that emerged during the debate over the road map between the White House, which was perceived to be pushing a policy more in tune with the Sharon government's policy, and the State Department, has not occurred during discussion on the US position on disengagement. Jerusalem Post reported that the only place where some disagreement has emerged, according to these officials, is that the State Department seems a bit more determined than the White House that settlers evacuated from Gaza not be resettled in the West Bank. Jerusalem Post also reported that Israel is trying to derail a new European initiative to supplement the road map that the GOI feels will again let the Palestinians off the hook by presenting a plan that calls on them to do less than they were called to do under the road map. Sunday, Jerusalem Post reported that in Dublin Friday FM Silvan Shalom embarked on a campaign to convince the international community that, even if the road map is not presently doable, the Palestinians still have responsibilities to fight terrorism.

Yediot reported that Elchanan Tenenbaum told his Israeli interrogators that he had deceived Hizbulah and not betrayed Israel. Sunday, leading media reported on Tenenbaum's admission that before being abducted he traveled to Dubai to complete a drug deal with Hizbulah. Ha'aretz reported that this week the High Court of Justice is due to discuss a petition against his immunity deal, although a High Court justice has declined to issue a temporary injunction to stop the bargain from being implemented.

During the weekend, all media reported on the killing Friday night of a couple in a shooting attack on the Lahav-Ashkelon road, along the Green Line, in the southern Hebron hills. PFLP-CG claimed responsibility for the attack. Sunday, leading media reported that three Islamic Jihad operatives were killed in an Israeli assassination attack in Gaza City.

Leading media reported that construction of the security fence in northwestern Jerusalem has been halted for one week by order of the High Court of Justice and at the request of Palestinian villagers. Ha'aretz reported that 30 residents of Mevasseret Zion, a western Jewish suburb of Jerusalem, joined the petition, and that another 200 signed a letter of protest about the route of the fence. This is the first time Israeli citizens living near the "seam line" between Israel and the West Bank joined a petition to the court over the fence's route. The media reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and President Moshe Katsav implicitly condemned the court's decision. Mofaz was quoted as saying that the defense establishment hopes to start construction of the southern segment of the fence by the end of the year.

All media reported that A/G Menachem Mazuz recommends

that the next Knesset elections should be held in 2006, a year ahead of the planned date.

Sunday, Jerusalem Post reported that Saturday PA security men arrested a man suspected of involvement in last week's bus bombing in Jerusalem.

Leading media reported that the members of the Fatah Revolutionary Council concluded their meeting by backing a cease-fire and the road map, but that they failed to decide on the issues of reforms and the disarming of militants. The media reported that Friday Nablus Mayor Ghassan Shakah announced his resignation, accusing the PA of failing to rein in armed thugs who are terrorizing Palestinians in his city and other Palestinian communities. An Israel Radio commentator said that Ghassan supports peace and cooperation with Israel.

Ha'aretz quoted Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chairman Yuval Steinitz as saying that the findings of the committee that looked into the preparations of Israel's intelligence branch with regard to an Iraqi missile attack on Israel could cause an upheaval in the intelligence community. Sunday, Yediot cited The New York Times as saying that the Iraqi Governing Council has rejected initiatives to bring back Jews to Iraq "because of the Palestinian problem."

Ha'aretz reported that the Israel Prison Service and the IDF are planning to transfer responsibility for more than 3,500 Palestinian security prisoners from the army to the prison authority.

Leading media reported that over the weekend Iran and Syria signed a military cooperation agreement.

Yediot reported that according to data presented by Defense Ministry D-G Amos Yaron to the Cabinet Sunday, Israeli security exports make up a tenth of all defense exports in the world. According to the survey, Israel is among the five largest defense exporters in the world. Leading media reported that Sunday the restricted diplomatic-defense cabinet approved the USD-1.1 billion deal with India, involving the sale of three Phalcon AWACS aircraft.

Sunday, Maariv reported that Manal Bakher (or Bakr), the daughter of Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala), who is married to an East Jerusalem physician, has requested Israeli citizenship.

Maariv reported that the Jewish-Mexican millionaire Moshe Saba, who had tried to purchase Channel 10-TV, is under investigation in the U.S. for alleged stock fraud.

A Maariv/New Wave poll shows that the left (mostly Meretz) would get five more seats in the Knesset if new elections were held today, mostly at the expense of Likud and Shinui.

11. State Department Release of 2003 Human Rights Report:

Summary:

Liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The leader of the free world is today imposing a dark regime in a number of spheres, both domestically and internationally, behavior that is deeply at odds with its enlightened image and its world role as a preacher. This is bad news for the world, maybe even worse than the immoral portrait of Israel that emerges from the report."

Block Quotes:

"U.S. Has Lost Its Moral Right to Preach"

Liberal columnist Gideon Levy wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 29): "Look who's preaching to Israel: last Wednesday, the U.S. State Department released its annual report on the state of human rights around the world. The chapter devoted to Israel makes the usual detailed and gloomy reading. Washington is critical of all the ills of the occupation, about which the human rights organizations and Israel have long since raised a hue and cry.... From this partial point of view, the report is important. The other side, however, is that the United

States has by its own hand lost its moral right to preach to any country in connection with human rights. To begin with, since 1976, no fewer than 820 people -- 35 percent of them blacks -- have been executed in the United States.... Second, the State Department, which authored the report, represents a state that tramples human rights more than most others.... A country that is holding 660 Afghan detainees at Guantanamo without trial and depriving them of basic rights is in no position to criticize administrative detentions carried out by other countries.... As for the situation in Israel: the United States bears direct responsibility for the violations of human rights in this country. If Washington truly wanted to, it could put an end to them, just as it could have long since brought the entire Israeli occupation to an end.... The leader of the free world is today imposing a dark regime in a number of spheres, both domestically and internationally, behavior that is deeply at odds with its enlightened image and its world role as a preacher. This is bad news for the world, maybe even worse than the immoral portrait of Israel that emerges from the report."

12. Alhurra TV Station:

Summary:

Palestinian journalist Daoub Kuttab wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Sponsoring foreign radio broadcasts has been a favorite tool of colonial European governments."

Block Quotes:

"America's Clumsy Outreach"

Palestinian journalist Daoub Kuttab wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 1): "In a desperate effort to reverse America's negative image in the Arab world, a new Arabic-language television station called Alhurra ('the free one') has been added to the diet of existing government-sponsored broadcasting outlets in the Arab region.... Judging from the broadcast content of its first day, Washington has a long way to go to achieve its goals. Alhurra operates with a USD 62-million grant from the U.S. government. Judging from its first broadcast day, there is no hint it will ever become self-reliant. Listeners can only conclude that Alhurra will always be the instrument of the U.S. government.... Sponsoring foreign radio broadcasts has been a favorite tool of colonial European governments.... While some expected the new station to be an important addition to the plurality of opinions available to the Arab public, its first day of broadcasting confirmed what the skeptics have been saying all along: what the U.S. needs to do is change its policy, not its media strategy.... Bush started his exclusive interview with Alhurra saying he hopes to encourage the spread of freedom in the Middle East. His definition of freedom was very clear: 'Open society, free parties, secular society and independent press.' Of course, Bush didn't waste his time dealing with the mundane issue of freedom. Rather he used his airtime to talk about his war on terror and what he considered his success in Iraq and Libya.... The interview conducted by Mowafq Harb, Alhurra's editor-in-chief, failed to challenge Bush on any of the issues being hotly debated in America.... The Arab audience was shocked that Harb didn't ask a single question about Israel's nuclear weapons when the president was talking ad nauseam about his efforts to free the Middle East from weapons of mass destruction."

KURTZER